

ANNUAL REPORT

Vermont Square Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

2020–2021

November 26, 2021

Vermont Square Parent-Child Mother Goose Program
720 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4

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Our program originated in Toronto in 1984 as The Mother Goose Enrichment Program, developed by Barry Dickson and Joan Bodger and offered under the auspices of the Children's Aid Society as an early intervention program. Katherine Grier and Celia Lottridge were invited to be part of that program. In 1986 after the pilot project ended, Katherine and Celia took the program out into the community as the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program (PCMG), which was incorporated in 1986 and became a registered charity in 1987.

The program is a joyful group experience for parents and their babies or two-to-four-year-olds. If vulnerable, well-meaning parents do not emotionally bond or expressively communicate with their young children, the parent-child relationships and the children's futures can be compromised. The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program® intervenes to prevent this outcome with a physically close and interactive program in which parents and children learn to share the power and pleasure of oral rhymes, songs, and stories. The approach is backed by decades of research, yet is so simple and natural that the parents effortlessly gain the skills and confidence that foster healthy relationships during their children's crucial early years, and the children enhance their neurological foundation for lifelong emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

All children's early experiences mold their brains, and the primary caregiver provides most of those experiences. Simple things like the caregiver's choice of words, tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, holding, and cuddling lay the neurological foundation for the child's life.

Since the peaks in a child's brain development for literacy, numeracy, social skills and emotional control all occur from ages one to three, the changes to a child's brain around this period are unlikely to be reversed. As a result, the return on investment during and close to this period is greater than for any other time in a person's life.

Because Parent-Child Mother Goose initiated a training and certification process for Parent-Child Mother Goose Program teachers nation-wide and internationally almost 30 years ago, there have been Parent-Child Mother Goose programs for many thousands of parents, babies and young children in every province in Canada as well as Afghanistan, Australia, China, United States, Iran, and Ecuador. Program languages include Indigenous languages, English, French, Spanish, Somali, Farsi, Dari, Mandarin, and ASL

Principal Activities 2020-2021

- 6 PCMG programs to underserved Toronto communities: Lakeshore, Elmbank Infant, Elmbank 2-4, Parkdale, Malvern, and Somali
- 19 PCMG Teacher Training Workshops to train PCMG teachers for agencies across Canada and abroad that wish to offer PCMG programs in their own communities, including Wiikwemikoong First Nation under a designated Ontario Trillium Foundation grant and Adrina Clinic for deaf and hard of hearing children in Herat, Afghanistan
- 160 books and disks to PCMG program providers and families across Canada and abroad
- Advocacy and partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations

Programs

Highlights from the Field

Please note that since some stories are very personal, some potentially identifying features, including the names of the programs, have been omitted from these excerpts from teachers' end-of-term reports and participant questionnaires in order to preserve confidentiality. Thank you so much to the program teachers for sharing these inspiring stories and quotes!

One mother who came with her husband and baby spoke no English, but lit up when she heard a Mandarin rhyme we had learned a couple of years ago. From then on, she would lead that rhyme for the group.

We provided the first social interactions in Canada for one mother, who said that she absolutely loves the program. It is helping her daughter to become accustomed to having a schedule and teaching her to speak and recognize others in her world, such as her teachers and other children. The mother loves the stories and the chat sessions, which allow her to ask questions and share her experiences, whether it be about the weather, clothing, travelling to the Falls or buying appropriate books for her daughter. She says she told her husband she has to get her Canadian driver's licence so that she can get to our programs when we start again in person!

One mother shared that her daughter used to sleep through the night, but had recently stopped and this has been hard on the whole family. She is a first-time mother and she seemed to be so overwhelmed that you just wanted to hug her. The advice that she was given by the teachers and another mother offered her some comfort. Another mother shared her similar experience and the two exchanged numbers.

On the last day of the session one mother told a story that she remembered hearing from her grandfather in India. This was inspiring for the other mothers and a wonderful way for her to end.

At the start of the lockdown, a single mother with two girls wrote asking if we knew where she might access some help. She was out of money for supplies and didn't know what to do. We were able to put her in touch with a program out of the community health centre in her neighbourhood. They quickly got in touch with her to offer support, including gift cards to local stores to see her through.

One mother who came every week became increasingly interested in the stories, and as her confidence increased, she began to tell them at home. She remembered hearing stories as a child and said she had discovered a new passion. Her questions and enthusiasm encouraged all of the participants. She often talked about how much our program helped her deal with the isolation and hard work of mothering two young children in lockdown.

One mother who never came to our Zoom program had been coming to our in-person program for about four years with two sons. When she first came, she had been struggling with her role as a mother, but over time she had relaxed as a parent and even reached out to new participants. When we phoned her this year, she said she was still using the rhymes at home with her children. She sounded strong and was dealing with the situation and with her children quite well.

One parent came with her daughter after being referred by an agency. Her child was not interested in engaging and was not focused or attentive even when her mother encouraged her. However, her mother loved coming to the program and found it an immense support. Very, very slowly, the child began to engage and started doing the rhymes with her mother. Eventually she started to show up on screen, excitedly saying hello and talking, and finally being happily present for the whole program.

A three-year-old who has been attending the program since she was in her mother's belly is so connected to the program that she is able to do all the rhymes and re-tell complicated stories with enthusiasm.

In one of the more isolated communities, there were fears and conspiracy theories about the vaccine, and some parents needed the support of their teachers to take it.

A couple of older siblings who had come to the program as babies also came throughout the session. They did the rhymes with their younger siblings and requested rhymes that they remembered.

One family said that their little one anticipates the program all week and does the rhymes herself.

One mother reported that rhymes are a great relief when she is trying to calm her baby while changing diapers. When she begins a rhyme, it distracts her baby and helps get them through together.

One mother was writing down the rhymes as we were doing them, as English is not her first language and she wanted to remember all the rhymes so she can use them later.

One child with developmental delay attends regularly and you can see how he now recognizes the teachers, smiles, and does his best to follow along.

Another mother, a paramedic on maternity leave, had tears speaking about how much the program has meant to her while being off with her baby and that it was “the only thing” she had to rely on regularly as a program for her and her baby.

One family reported hearing their little one doing rhymes like “Tick tock, Tick tock” on the monitor during the night!

QUOTES FROM PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- I gained the confidence to make up stories to tell my daughter or tell an oral story that I know, even if I may forget some parts. I am a quiet person who doesn't talk much, so it helps me and my son be together.
- I love to watch my child’s responses as he delights in the story.
- Please continue supporting programs like this because it's beneficial for families and their children to have activities they can learn and enjoy especially in this time of pandemic.
- Parent-Child Mother Goose has had such a positive impact on my family. The staff were so warm and welcoming. This was the first program I attended after my daughter was born and it felt like such a safe and supportive atmosphere. I learned positive ways to connect with my baby through stories, songs, and rhymes. My mother also attended with us when she could and really enjoyed this time with her granddaughter. We started using the songs and rhymes at home, so my partner learned them, as well. Now we have built a repertoire of playful ways to connect with our daughter and support her early literacy skills.
- I started attending the in-person program about a year ago and from my first phone call with the teacher, I was warmly welcomed. I had experienced postpartum depression and anxiety after having my daughter, so the program helped me through a difficult time.
- Participating in the program gave me an outing to look forward to each week. The staff created such a safe and stress-free environment. It was also valuable for me to connect with other parents so my daughter and I could make new friends. When the program went online during the pandemic, I was thankful to continue learning and practicing the songs and rhymes on Zoom with the other families. It is such a pleasure to see my daughter smiling and asking for more! Thank you so much to the funders and supporters of the program for giving my daughter and I this opportunity.
- I enjoy the quiet time listening to the stories. It provides a moment for me to rest and listen. Since having a baby, I haven’t had much time to read for pleasure, so it’s a nice treat to hear a story – as adults we don’t always get this opportunity.
- It was a challenge with distractions at home, and we would have loved being with the other parents and children in person, but we are so grateful that this program is offered virtually as a resource during COVID. A time during the day that I, as the mother, didn’t have to plan an activity for. It was a good duration of time as well.
- Thank you for your generosity - please continue this wonderful resource for families.
- This has been a wonderful program and I am so happy that I was able to participate. The calm and positive nature of those leading the class was a joy. Participating gave me the confidence to do something that was a bit slower paced and without distractions like toys. I use the rhymes almost daily and love seeing her smile when reciting them.

- Our teachers are fabulous story tellers. Watching them has made me a better storyteller too. Thank you!
- Just want to say how thankful I am to have been a part of this program for the last 9 months. It really will be the biggest social memory I will have when thinking back to my daughter's first half of life! We continue to use the rhymes and lullabies for every nap and sleep. My daughter was diagnosed with ocular albinism a few months ago and she has low vision, so the rhymes and songs have been amazing, as her hearing will be her strength and it has been a great way for me to connect with her. Another silver lining is that she can see things that are very close to her, so the classes being virtual allowed her to see the other babies and participants. Screens will be a huge resource for her as she moves through life and this program allowed us to find that tool very early on.
- Words can't describe what this program has meant to us this past year.
- So beneficial for my mental health as a parent to be able to meet other parents and babies during this pandemic, as all the usual in-person parent-child programming is shut down. For my child, it is one of his few opportunities to meet other babies or children and has been so helpful in teaching him about routines, words, actions, music.
- I love watching my child's responses as he delights in the story.
- This program is vital for new parents and their children – thank you for supporting it and I hope it continues for a long time!
- Thank you for supporting a program that helps mothers and young children have fun, learn new rhymes, bond, and meet other people in the community that are similar. It helps us maintain sanity when we know other parents out there can come together and understand and have a great time.
- I'll miss you this summer! You helped me a lot, especially with me being new to this country. My heart is with this Mother Goose program.
- I like listening to stories because it sparks imagination. It makes the story even more exciting because of the hand gestures and changes in the tone of voice.
- I am a quiet person, doesn't talk much so it helps me and my son together.
- Please continue supporting programs like this because it's beneficial for families and their children to have activities they can learn and enjoy, especially in this time of pandemic.
- It was a very difficult year with being a new mom and the pandemic and not being able to build those new relationships. This was fun and something to look forward to every week and my daughter really enjoyed it!
- Great program for babies. In person would have been so much better but we made do with what was going on in the world. My daughter and I enjoyed our time and wish we could join the next session but I have to go back to work.
- Coming to the program has been such a gift. My daughter and I began attending the program when she was just 7 weeks old at the community centre. As a first-time mom, I was tired yet anxious all the time. I was always thinking about whether what I was doing was enough and if my baby was okay. Was I feeding her enough? Was my baby hitting her development milestones? Going to Mother Goose at that time was a safe place to ask questions from the staff and other mom's which made me feel heard and well supported.
- As I become more comfortable as a parent, attending the program was a great way to feel connected with other parents in the area and I looked forward to attending every week. When

my daughter Adalyn turned 4 months old, the pandemic hit, but I was thrilled when I learned that the program was moving onto Zoom. It has been a great way to stay connected with other parents, the staff, and amazing for my baby to hear familiar rhymes.

- Lynda and Ren do a great job of changing the stories each week. At home, I often find that my daughter and I read the same books all of the time on rotation, and it's great that she gets to hear something new from a voice other than her mom.
- The program has been great for me, my son, and my partner! It's a great way to improve my son's language development and to get him engaged in his learning. It was a great way for me to feel connected to other parents and babies virtually during the pandemic.
- It was great for my son's language development, and it also encouraged me to make sure I was sharing stories with my son.
- I've loved connecting with my baby and learning new ways to help him grow and learn.
- This is a fantastic program. I loved the Zoom version, but know the in person will be even more appreciated.
- During COVID, this program was especially helpful for us as first time parents to connect with other mothers and children. We are so thankful for this program and that it was also free to join. So grateful! The program was always lovely and we would be welcomed by name.
- Our program that we attended was more songs. They were songs that I'd never heard of or things my mother might sing, but again, because of COVID, there is no opportunity to have that union or interaction.
- Yes, please keep funding this program and sharing it with others via social channels and mother groups. It was essential for my social sanity during lockdown and early building blocks as a 1st time mother to connect with my son. Thank you!!!!
- This program was especially helpful for us as first-time parents during the pandemic to connect with other mothers and children. We are so thankful for this program and that it was also free to join. So grateful! The program was always lovely and we would be welcomed by name.
- There were songs that my mother might sing, but because of COVID, there was no opportunity to have that interaction.
- Please keep funding this program and sharing it with others via social channels and mother' groups. It was essential for my social sanity during lockdown and for early building blocks as a first-time mother to connect with my son. Thank you!!!!Personal attention was very accommodating, and the whole spirit of the program very supportive.
- I enjoy visualizing the story and anticipating what is going to happen next. Also learning traditions and cultures other than mine.
- I believe every family with young children should go to the program.
- I learned new rhymes and new strategies for sharing rhymes with different children. It was an incredibly valuable experience for me.
- The stories are very engaging and relaxing.
- When we found out about the program, it was already in the middle of the season. We tried to come whenever we were available because it helped my son to learn that there are other kids and people aside from his parents and immediate relatives. We were able to socialize online with the other parents and their kids, and it gave us a creative activity to do together.
- The hand gestures and changes in tone of voice make the story even more exciting.

- We joined in October and Mother Goose was our first social interaction in Canada. I was hesitant at first to do it online and wasn't sure if it would work for my daughter. But I have loved the whole experience. My daughter learns words that she picks up from the session – I hear her say them during the week. Initially she was not interested, but now she knows what we are doing and she knows the teachers. The program helps me with my parenting skills too. I like the time at the end when I can ask questions. I followed a recommendation for a book and am now reading it to my daughter.
- Thank-you for this beautiful program. The storytelling I like myself. For my daughter, she loves the rhymes – they are for her. She likes to do the Grandfather Clock now outside of the session and Zoom Zoom Zoom. Also we like the different languages we hear from other families. We don't understand the exact words, but we love the whole interaction. I also enjoy the presence of one of the older sisters who comes.
- We like the different songs every week. It's good for my daughter to repeat them and hear them again. Some of the songs in this program are new for her. She especially likes Smooth Road and Where are the Stars?
- I like how the parents bring in their own stories and songs. Even if we don't understand all the words of the Mandarin rhyme, we have caught the sense of it.
- We are not face to face, but doing a Zoom program is good practice for later on in school, and it's good practice for other modes of learning.
- I find that exposing kids to the rhymes leads us as parents to sit and interact with them. My daughter and I like to hear the different languages from other families too. I really appreciate the way that the program is presented. I can sense the passion the teachers put into it. I have been to other programs and honestly they are not the same. I also love that there are no toys involved, just the words, and that means we can do the rhymes when we are out, like in a restaurant, or anywhere.
- We have been coming for a few weeks and my children really enjoy it. I wasn't sure how I would like an online program but I do like it. I used to do programs with her older brother, and this is a way that I can do something with my daughter too. Her language is not developing as quickly as his and this program is what was recommended to help her. It is also a way of bonding, between her and me. We have this hour that is just for us, the two of us, to be together and do the program together.
- We started when my daughter was seven months old and we came to the in-person program at the library. It's very important for me that the mums socialize with each other. Also, my daughter is an only child and it's important for her to see other children. When we did the program in person we would share a lot and it's amazing how it is still like that for us. My daughter looks forward to coming and asks for her "Zoom friends." She calls them in Spanish her "Amigitos on Zoom". We use the rhymes all week. We say Zoom Zoom Zoom when we are going on the road – when she hears that, she knows that we are going out!

Program Statistics

There were 313 adults and 323 children registered in our directly delivered virtual Parent-Child Mother Goose programs in Toronto this year. Participants were as usual culturally diverse, and many shared rhymes and stories from their mother tongues. Program participants' cultures and languages included: Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Filipino, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Telugu, Tigrigna, Tamil, Tibetan, and Urdu.

Program Funding

The majority of the direct costs of our Lakeshore, Parkdale and two Elmbank Programs were funded by the City of Toronto Community Services Partnership.

Most of the direct costs of our bilingual Somali Program were funded by Etobicoke Brighter Futures Coalition.

Our Malvern Program was funded by the Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation.

General program funding was provided by the Tippet Foundation, Potruff Family Foundation, Jackman Foundation, and TD Bank Group.

First Nations Project funding was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Please see Donors below for full list of all donors. Many thanks!

Social Enterprise Activities

Thanks to the model developed in 1992 by PCMG co-founder Celia Lottridge, our PCMG teacher training workshops and our books and disks are offered as a supplementary service to agencies and individuals anywhere in the world who are interested in PCMG, with the ultimate goal of disseminating the PCMG program and its methods and benefits as widely as possible. In a good year, our social enterprise is a small source of revenue to support PCMG operations.

PCMG Teacher Training Workshops

Teacher training workshops create new Mother Goose teachers, expand and strengthen the network of Mother Goose programs, help to maintain the program standards, and develop important skills and awareness in people who work with children in other ways. PCMG delivered 19 teacher training workshops in 2020-2021 in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Quebec, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Book and Disk Sales

Our most popular books were *The Moon is Round* and the *Mother Goose* board book. The most popular CD's were *Sally Goes Round the Sun* and *A Smooth Road*.

Partnerships

First Nations Project

Indigenous parents still live in the shadow of the residential school experience that almost destroyed their cultural identity. That became even more apparent in the past year with the revelation of unmarked graves. As desirable as it may be for today's Indigenous parents to enhance their parenting skills, they need to do so in the light and spirit of their own culture.

Thanks to a designated Ontario Trillium Foundation \$105,200 grant, PCMG worked with three northern Ontario First Nations communities, Big Trout Lake, M'Chigeeng, and Sandy Lake First Nations to support parenting and early child development for parents and their children aged 0 to 4.

As this three-year partnership is drawing to a close later in the year, we delivered two more virtual teacher training workshops for Wikwemikong First Nation, near M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island, to which the other three communities were invited, and we look forward to building on the treasured connections that we have made in all these communities.

Parent-Child Mother Goose in Australia

We regularly share information and experiences with our fellow Geese in Australia.

Babies' Best Start

Babies' Best Start refers vulnerable participants to our Malvern program. Their home visitors who have taken our training sometimes visit our programs to enhance and supplement their early child development expertise, and they contributed to our book *I Bring You a Story*.

Etobicoke Brighter Futures Coalition

As a long-time member of the outstanding EBFC, who fund most of the direct costs of our Somali PCMG Program, we participate in the EBFC evaluation and coordination committees and meetings.

Program and Training Committee

The Program & Training Committee are a national volunteer group responsible for the policy and standards of the Parent-Child Mother Goose programs and teacher training workshops. We are very grateful to the dedicated women who do the invaluable work of maintaining the integrity of our programs and workshops.

Early Child Education Colleges

PCMG offers students from ECE and Child Care degree programs the opportunity to gain exceptional experience and knowledge as volunteer childcare assistants in our programs.

Midaynta Community Services

We are very happy to partner with Midaynta for our bilingual Somali Program. Midaynta Executive Director Mahad Yusuf offers highly knowledgeable support and promotes the program with families, and refers the program parents to study English and computer use.

Family Resource Agencies

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is offered throughout the Greater Toronto Area by other organizations with teachers who have taken our teacher training workshops.

- Afghan Women's Organization
- Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre
- Blue Hills Child and Family Centre
- Centre for Immigrant and Community Services
- Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre
- Parkdale High Park OEYC (Earlscourt-Creche Child Development Institute)
- Milton Community Resource Centre
- Ministry of Education
- Oakville Parent-Child Centre
- The Chartwell House Early Learning Centre
- YWCA Durham
- OEYC Today's Family
- Story Planet East York
- Toronto Family Resources
- Regent Park Community Health Centre
- Region of Peel
- Mississauga Parent-Child Resource Centres
- Mothercraft/Breaking the Cycle
- York Child Development & Family Services
- Native Child & Family Services
- Parent Resources
- OEYC Stoney Creek
- OEYC Today's Family
- OEYC Markham Family Day Care Services
- OEYC York North
- Oakville Parent-Child Centre
- YWCA Durham OEYC

Memberships

PCMG is a member of Families Canada (previously known as the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs FRP), Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN), Storytellers of Canada, Etobicoke Brighter Futures Coalition, Social Planning Toronto, the Centre for Social Innovation, and Sick Kids Hospital Infant Mental Health Promotion.

Special Mention

Parent-Child Mother Goose in Afghanistan

After Dr. Guita Movallali was contacted by a clinic in Afghanistan wanting to have a Mother Goose program for deaf and hard of hearing children like her program in Iran, we set up a virtual Mother Goose teacher training workshop that was funded by an individual donor.

Guita translated our teacher training manual into Farsi and in Toronto Mirwais Wahidi edited a Dari version. The workshop was big enough to train all of the Afghan group plus several Iranians who also work with deaf and hard of hearing children.

The training and Guita's ongoing support seeded new Mother Goose programs in Iran and Afghanistan and we are delighted that even the program in Afghanistan continues to this day.

Parent-Child Mother Goose in Iran

Since 2011, Dr. Guita Movallali had been offering a customized Mother Goose program at her Faranak Clinic at Tehran in Iran. The program supports children who are deaf or hard of hearing together with their parents. Since these children have hearing aids or cochlear implants and want to learn to hear and speak, Mother Goose is extraordinarily beneficial to the children and supportive for the parents.

Parent-Child Mother Goose in Sarajevo

After teacher training workshop facilitator Lynda Howes and PCMG teacher Sarah Abusharar initiated the training of Mother Goose teachers while on vacation (!) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they have stayed in touch on Skype and shared our resources on virtual PCMG programming.

Parent-Child Mother Goose Research and Articles

We continue to post new material to our three repositories of research and articles for the PCMG community. Links are on our website for:

- Parent-Child Mother Goose Research, Articles
- Parent-Child Mother Goose-Related Research, Articles
- First Nations Early Childhood Resources

Please use, enjoy, and share!

Parent-Child Mother Goose for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Now that powerhouse Dr. Guita Movallali has moved to Toronto, we are looking forward to seeding new programs for deaf and hard of hearing children in Canada. The first one will be at VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children. Please note that there is already an excellent and well established ASL Parent-Child Mother Goose for deaf and hard of hearing children or parents that prefer to use sign language.

Thank you to our Contributors!

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program extends heartfelt thanks to the creative and dedicated individuals who brought about delivery of PCMG programs and workshops to the community!

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who so generously support our cause!

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Thank you!

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